

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover (Extracts)

A QUESTION OF MILITARY STRATEGY

During the last half of 1917 and the early part of 1918, the Allied Governments were in constant turmoil of indecision on major military strategy. It also involved food. The question was. Should we send a large American Army to Europe? In the early stages the British and French military authorities opposed a large American Army, believing that they could handle the situation with the aid of our fleet, some special services, such as air forces, engineers, together with ample food and munitions.

General Pershing and our military leaders did not believe we could quickly end the war without large ground troops and were insistent that they be sent. But this could not be done without positive assurance of British and French ships for troop transport and supplies. But for them to furnish the ships they must abandon their long voyages to the Southern Hemisphere, China, and the Indies for supplies, and depend upon Canada and the United States. This in turn involved sacrifice of their foreign trade in many parts of the world. They greatly feared we could not produce the supplies. There was some reason for this trepidation in view of our prewar record of exports and the fact that we had two partial crop failures in 1916 and 1917.

Also, in the background was the specter of German submarine sinkings. In April, 1917, the month we entered the war, more than 850,000 tons of merchant ships were sunk. . . .

It was my contribution to this strategy, by assurance of food to the Allies, that caused General Pershing to inscribe a note to me later which I may be permitted the vanity of reproducing: "For Herbert Hoover, whose contribution to the success of the Allied cause can hardly be overestimated." (PP. 255-256)

THE FOOD BLOCKADE

To lower the morale of the enemy by reducing his food supply was one of the major strategies of the war. I did not myself believe in the food blockade. I did not believe that it was the effective weapon of which the Allies were so confident. I did not believe in starving women and children. And above all, I did not believe that stunted bodies and deformed minds in the next generation were secure foundations upon which to rebuild civilization.

The facts were that soldiers, government officials, munitions workers and farmers in enemy countries would always be fed; that the impact of blockade was upon the weak and the women and children. Moreover, because of the food blockade, Germany had no need to spend money abroad and she would have long since gone broke if she could have bought what her public would have demanded. I insisted that the war would not be won by the blockade on food for women and children, but by the blockade on military supplies and by military action. . . (P. 257)

Source

Volume I: *The Years of Adventure, 1874-1920.* (1952)

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